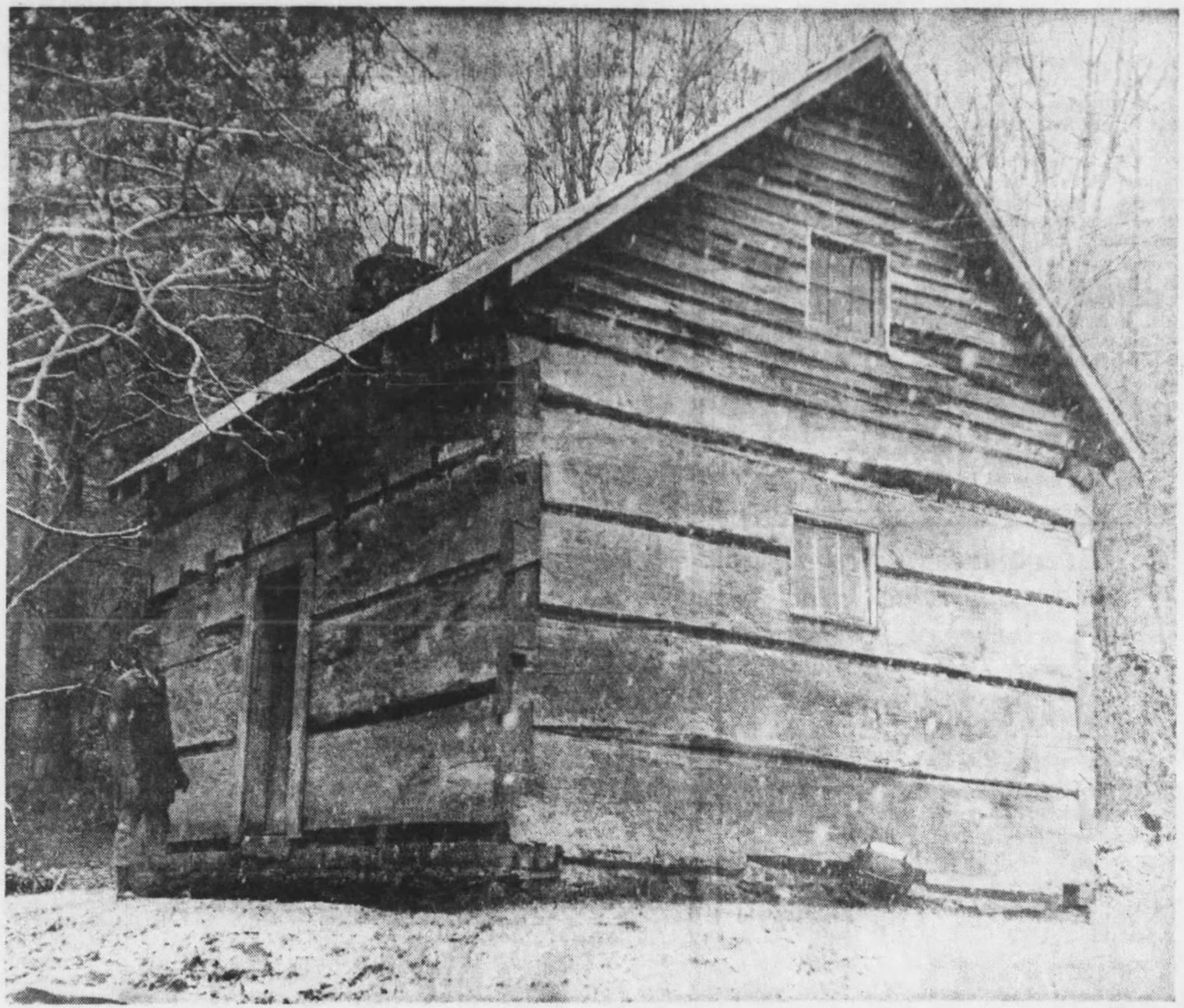
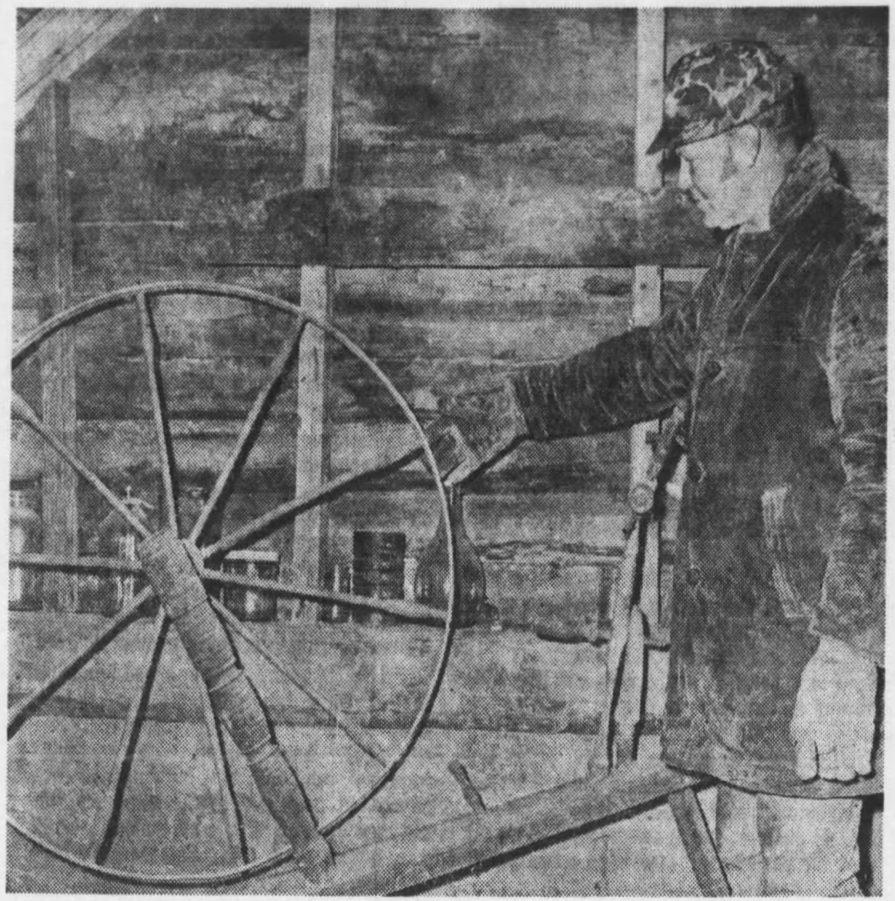
An Ancient Log Cabin Is Returning



Photos—Bob Harrell

Weather-Worn Log Cabin Near Suches and in 'Lost Hollow' Tested by Season's Third Snow



In Cabin's Loft Don Nichols Inspects Spinning Wheel

Todds Recall the Good and Hard Times in Old Home

DATELINE
SUCHES
GEORGIA
By BOB HARRELL

SUCHES, Ga. — James Gooch built his log cabin to withstand the tests of time and weather.

Bob Harrell

His handiwork is there for all to see this day. Five hand - hewn yellow popular logs lying on top of each other extend upward over 12 feet. The "heart" poplar logs are amazing in their bigness. The largest is 27 inches in diameter. When the mountaineer cut this tree, the entire forest must have shuddered with its fall.

Time and weather will have their way and now the roof needs help and the floor sags. But those heart poplar logs remain very firm. Coming to the old log cabin's rescue are Don Nichols and Don Singletary, new owners of Todd Dahlia Farm and its accompanying acres, which includes the old cabin.

Don Nichols stood in the falling snow and explained, "We're going to save it and make it livable again. But we're going to be careful to keep every improvement in character with the cabin."

Don pulled the latch string and we entered through the back door. In the dimness of the cabin and in front of the field-stone fireplace sat an old cast-iron cooking pot and Dutch oven as if waiting to be used again. In the corner was an old meal sifter. Under the stair steps was a waist-high closet. Above that was a sliding board which revealed storage space for smaller items. You know that it must have been crowded living here.

Don explained about bringing the old cabin back to life. "We're going to be working on it all winter and it won't be ready for viewing until spring. We've got to do it this winter or it might be too late."

It was noon when Alvin Todd walked the short distance from his home to the cabin and announced, "Wife's got dinner ready." So Don and I made new tracks in the snow behind Todd. After a dinner of country ham, corn on the cobb, lima beans, fresh tomatoes and banana pudding, Mr. and Mrs. Todd talked about the old cabin.

The Todds know each log and squeak of the cabin. They reared six children in it. And it wasn't so long ago.

Mrs. Todd said, "We moved in it in 1929. It was my grandfather's and my father's old home place. I was born across the creek in another log cabin."

I asked, "How old is that cabin?"

Mrs. Todd answered, "I'm not sure but I always remember my dad who was called 'Uncle Wash' as saying it was built when he was 'a lad of a boy.' He was almost 92 when he died in 1960. I guess that makes it built in the 1870s. He always said he was just big enough to carry a board for the cabin."

"Did you have electric lights in 1929?"

Mrs. Todd laughed, "Gee, no! We had covered wagons up here then." And she pulled out a yellowed picture showing a covered wagon. "That was in 1925. There was no road in here then. My daddy bought the first truck in this area when they built the Woody Gap Road."

Mr. Todd said, "We used lamp light. Used it lots of days, too, because that old cabin was dark. Made it hard for the kids to see." Mr. and Mrs. Todd agreed that it was 1947 before electricity came to Lost Hollow.

The conveniences which Mrs. Todd can recall while housekeeping for 20 years in a log cabin can be counted on one hand and one finger. "We had a large heavy iron stove. It had a big reservoir for water on it and I did a lot of canning. 'Course, the stove helped with heating but we depended on the fireplace for heat.'"

Running water? Folks told Todd that it couldn't be done because they thought the spring on the mountain wasn't higher than the cabin. Mr. Todd discovered that it was, by about nine feet. So he found a man who had some extra fire hose and all at once Todd had his "water line." He whittled the couplings to connect hose sections.

Mrs. Todd did not have a refrigerator as housewives do today. But what Todd built her worked about as well. It was a milk box of yellow poplar and built on three levels. Fresh spring water flowed through it continually. Milk has stored in the deepest part, other perishable items on the second level and the smallest items on the level which was very shallow. For a sink Todd went again to yellow poplar and made it.

I asked Mrs. Todd, "How did you manage washing and ironing for those six kids?"

She laughed, "Just did as you could. No, Monday wasn't wash day. Everyday was wash day. I've used a charcoal iron, gas iron and sadiron."

Todd added, "She had a washing machine."

She replied, "But I never enjoyed working that handle up and down. I supplied the power. And that old rub board!" She thought about times past, especially washing. "I wouldn't go back to the good old days."

Fun? The Todds had it. Todd brought the first battery powered radio into this part of the mountains in 1929. He recalled, "They came here from all over to listen to it. Saturday nights mostly. It had that big old horn on it, you know. I'd set it up on the front porch (the porch is gone now) and we'd listen to the Grand Ole Opry."

Mrs. Todd explained, "He'd turn it up real loud. He didn't have his hearing aid then. You could hear the music down to the first bridge, I guess."

Bedding was changed after the rye was harvested each year. Mrs. Todd said, "When thrashing was over, we'd empty the old straw and make fresh rye straw tics. Then we'd put the feather mattress on top of that."

"Where did you get your feathers?"

"We grew our own feathers, geese. Some used chicken feathers."

Todd explained, "Chicken was poor man's feathers."

Todd laughs with the telling of one Christmas when he brought home coconuts, one for each child. It was the first time the youngsters had seen coconuts. He said, "When I told Thelma what it was she said 'Poppa, there is a Santa Claus.'"

Time? There never was enough of it in the old log cabin. From the time the kids were 7, they worked, starting with a hoe and learning the difference between weeds and vegetables or dahlias. Mrs. Todd said, "We tried to set up goals. Work and maybe you could go to high school. Work and maybe we could get us a good house. Work and you'd be happy."

Mr. and Mrs. Todd did pretty well by their kids in that old log cabin. Eddie Mae, who died young, graduated from college. Nell went through college and is married. Buddy graduated from college, majoring in dairy science. Elsie has her master's degree. George is one year from retiring from the Air Force. Thelma is a medical secretary and has yet to make less that an "A" in any subject she ever took.

In 1949 Mr. and Mrs. Todd built their "better home." It was the first brick house in this section, an oddity which some folks considered inferior to a frame house.

When the Todds occupied their brick home, they had the old log cabin moved just a few yards away. There it stands today. And come spring it will have been helped to withstand another century of weather.

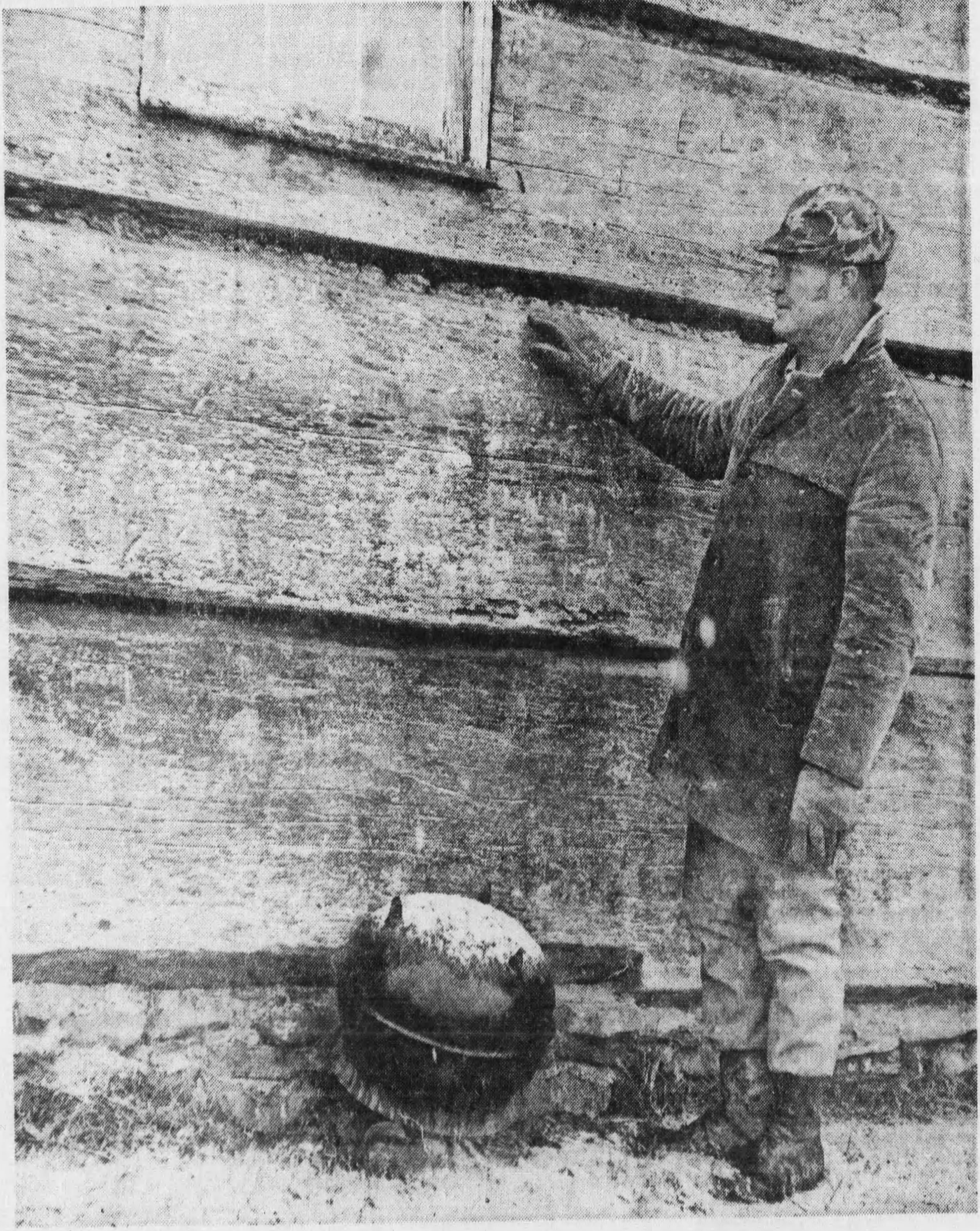
I find it hard to separate Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Todd and their cabin and the life they have lived there and the children they have reared.

It is as if Mr. and Mrs. Todd had taken strength from those huge yellow poplar logs and passed it on to another generation.

They are strong and good people.

Don Nichols Shows Log Notching

Alvin Todd Once Cabin Resident



Three Yellow Poplar Logs in Cabin Make Tall Man Look Small